



Project Team

Congestion Relief & Bus Rapid Transit Projects

APPENDIX Y2

I-405 CORRIDOR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

**I-405, SR520 to SR522 Stage 1
(Kirkland Stage 1)**

**Draft RFP
March 22, 2005**



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**

I-405 Public Information Plan

January through December 2004

Background

With the state Legislature's approval of a five-cent gas tax increase, \$485 million will be used to bring congestion relief improvements to three critical stretches of Interstate 405. These are the "nickel projects":

- ❖ Renton area: Add one lane approaching the I-405/SR 167 junction (northbound from SR 181 to SR 167 and southbound from SR 169 to SR 167).
- ❖ Bellevue area: Add one lane in each direction between SE 8th Street and I-90 and rebuild the Wilburton Tunnel.
- ❖ Kirkland area: Add one lane northbound between NE 70th Street to NE 124th Street and one lane southbound between SR 522 and SR 520.

The I-405 team is coordinating with the WSDOT office of communications on a cohesive strategy for communicating about these projects.

While the gas tax revenue is significant, more resources will be needed to complete the \$4.7 billion, 10- to 15-year implementation plan approved by the I-405 Executive Committee (itself a subset of an \$11 billion long-range master plan). The three-county Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) may provide a large piece of that additional funding if voters approve a financing package at a referendum expected to be held in fall 2004.

Communications goals

Throughout 2004, we will focus on meeting the following goals:

- ❖ Create high visibility of the I-405 "nickel projects" as high-impact, incremental steps for achieving the long-term project vision, as determined by the community process.
- ❖ Increase understanding of the vital importance of the project to the mobility and economic vitality and environmental sustainability of the region and state, and the project's relevance to Washington state's transportation system.
- ❖ Maintain, strengthen and broaden I-405 jurisdictional and grassroots partnerships.

Communications strategies

We will meet these goals by using the following strategies.

- ❖ Support project committees (funding and phasing, steering and executive) as the nickel projects move forward and the RTID funding package becomes defined.
- ❖ Take advantage of the four project-specific environmental assessments (North Renton, South Renton, Bellevue and Kirkland) to communicate directly with residents and businesses about details of the "nickel" projects, and to reinforce the broader vision.

- ❖ Proactively broaden the ally network, educate supporters about the nickel projects and the ultimate vision, and provide opportunities for them to actively participate as project messengers.
- ❖ Use proactive and creative media relations to promote key I-405 messages, particularly value and momentum messages.
- ❖ Use audience research to monitor public opinion, refine messaging, provide a platform to demonstrate continued strong support for improvements, and identify information needs for the construction phase.

Messages

Project messages, to be incorporated in communications strategies and tools, will continue to be grouped into four overarching messaging categories.

- ❖ *Vision* messages, focused on creating a more balanced transportation system, the "smart" freeway, innovative solutions such as bus rapid transit, design-build construction, congestion relief.
 - *Regional benefits*
 - I-405 is an indispensable link in the transportation network around Lake Washington.
 - I-405 provides a vital relief valve for I-5 and other arteries on the west side of the lake.
 - I-405 improvements will help reduce three of the worst traffic congestion spots in the Puget Sound region – critical for protecting quality of life and economic opportunity.
 - Without improvement, rush hour trips in 2020 will take about 40 percent longer than today.
 - I-405 improvements help focus economic investment and population growth *within* the Urban Growth Boundary.
 - *Multimodal benefits*
 - Improving I-405 helps ensure that a variety of transportation choices remain available and expand over time.
 - I-405 improvements will help maintain travel reliability for HOV lane users, 70 percent of whom commute in car- and vanpools.
 - The long-range I-405 program will *double* the number of vanpools in the entire Puget Sound region.
 - Transit service in the I-405 corridor will increase by 50 percent, as will the number of park-and-ride spaces (from 10,000 to 15,000).
- ❖ *Value* messages, demonstrating how the project will help sustain and improve the economy while benefiting the environment.
 - *Economic benefits*
 - Eastside businesses have long been and will continue to be a primary engine of growth for Washington state.
 - Improving I-405 – a principal route within the Urban Growth Boundary – helps keep economic growth robust and sustainable.

- Employment along the I-405 corridor will grow by 35 percent by 2020. That's nearly 145,000 new jobs.
- Congestion relief will lead to travel time savings of \$569 million a year – allowing workers to be working instead of stuck in traffic.
 - With no improvements, rush hour trips in 2020 will take about 40 percent longer than today.
- As a principal corridor for goods from the Port of Seattle, Sea-Tac International Airport and Kent Valley warehouses, I-405 improvements will help maintain reliability for freight businesses.
 - Twice as much freight is carried on I-405 than is moved through the Port of Seattle over the course of a year.
- *Mobility benefits*
 - Improving I-405 helps keep travel times predictable for workers, employers, businesses and residents.
 - Overall corridor congestion will be reduced by 20 percent and the number of accidents will decrease because the roadway will be safer.
 - As a principal highway within the Urban Growth Boundary, improving I-405 helps the Eastside accommodate an estimated 35 percent population growth by 2020 without encouraging sprawl.
 - That level of growth is like adding two new cities the size of Bellevue and eight employers the size of Microsoft.
 - Unlike the Westside, I-405 is the *only* high-capacity north-south option on the Eastside, which highlights the need to improve its efficiency and reduce traffic on clogged local streets.
- *Environmental benefits*
 - The I-405 projects provide significant funding for environmental mitigation that otherwise would likely never be done.
 - Specifically, our approach includes:
 - Minimizing the use of detention ponds;
 - Restoring natural stream flow and removing stream blockages in several locations;
 - Improving salmon habitat; and
 - Approaching mitigation from a holistic watershed view.
 - The I-405 projects will provide the opportunity to implement pilot projects that will serve as models for the region.
 - Because of topographical challenges, XX percent of the I-405 nickel projects funding is being allocated on environmental mitigation, significantly more than other highway projects in the state.
 - I-405 improvements will help reduce traffic congestion, which will reduce emissions of carbon monoxide and other pollutants.
- ❖ *Cooperation* messages that show how a landmark agreement has led to the right product to meet customers' needs.
- ❖ *Momentum* messages, focused on how the gas tax revenue will kick things into high gear, and on other key milestones.

Parallel Paths

Given existing and potential funding sources, our communications plan must take into account two parallel paths – nickel projects, and potential regional (RTID) funding.

Nickel projects – The focus here is to implement a long-term effort to communicate the value and specifics of the three nickel projects along the I-405 corridor. This constitutes the bulk of the communications effort and consists of a variety of tools to inform and educate members of the public and specific audiences, such as state and local elected and appointed officials, the news media, and directly affected residents and businesses.

Regional (RTID) funding – The focus here is more short-term – to gather information and educate a small group of opinion leaders so that the I-405 program is adequately considered as regional priorities are set for the RTID funding package. The window of opportunity for this effort is between now (Jan. 1, 2004) and mid-March (unless the RTID Board changes its schedule).

The Mini Action Plan for this effort consists of three main strategies:

1. Information gathering.
Rita Brogan will lead an effort to identify a handful of key opinion influencers involved in the RTID effort. The idea here is to seek information about the "lay of the land" with RTID and to determine the level of education influencers have about I-405.
2. Informal briefings.
Certain key opinion influencers need to be briefed informally on the I-405 program and its benefits. These individuals will be identified through a combination of Rita's and Craig's efforts.
3. Staying close to Dave Dye's efforts.
As administrator of UCO, Dave has been designated WSDOT's point person for RTID. Dave knows the I-405 project well and is a member of the I-405 Strategic Advisory Board. Regardless of this, Craig must stay in front of Dave to monitor the ebbs and flows of negotiations and provide information about I-405 (and SR 509).

Communications Strategies and Tools

To ensure the most effective communications during the project, a broad range of communication tools will be needed. These tools are organized into five areas as shown on the following page.

Communication Strategy Area	Tools
<u>Committee support</u> <i>Support project committees (funding and phasing, steering and executive) as the project move forward with the \$4.7 billion implementation plan.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maps and other descriptive materials to support the process for matching project components to projected available revenue. "At-a-glance" fact sheets about project components for use by committee members.
<u>Public Info & Outreach</u> <i>Take advantage of the four project-specific environmental assessments (North Renton, South Renton, Bellevue and Kirkland) to communicate directly with residents and businesses about details of the "nickel" projects, and to reinforce the broader vision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce "I-405 Progress Report" describing the I-405 "nickel projects" and ultimate vision and distribute through U.S. mail, newspaper(s), public buildings, speakers bureau presentations. Keep web site updated with current info. Schedule speakers bureau presentations by project team managers. Update & repackage stakeholder/press briefing kit with revised fact sheets, Q&A, etc. Hold neighborhood briefings/open houses/informational meetings. Send e-mails with links to web site to employer transportation coordinators & other e-mail lists. Prepare and distribute articles for municipal, employer and association newsletters.
<u>Partnership Network</u> <i>Proactively broaden the ally network, educate allies about the nickel projects and the ultimate vision, and provide opportunities for them to actively participate as project messengers.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information to and coordinate with advocacy groups such as the Eastside Transportation Association, East King County Chambers of Commerce, etc. Recruit major employers and prominent community leaders to participate as speakers in the Speakers Bureau.
<u>Media Relations</u> <i>Use proactive and creative media relations to promote key messages, particularly value and momentum messages.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold regular deskside (or on-corridor) media briefings with key reporters. Support reporters' efforts to cover major project meetings (such as Executive Committee). Research, develop and pitch a variety of story angles. Visit editorial boards twice or three times a year. Coordinate with UCO/WSDOT media relations efforts.
<u>Research</u> <i>Use audience research to monitor public opinion, refine messaging, provide a platform to demonstrate continued strong support for improvements, and identify information needs for the construction phase.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek input on messaging from opinion leaders. Seek input from participants at EA meetings. Conduct opinion survey in early 2004 to gauge awareness of and support for I-405 improvements.